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November 21, 1979

Honorable Peter W. Rodino, Jr.
Chairman, Committee on the Judiciary
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Chairman:

The Secretary has asked me to reply to your letter of October 31 concerning the Department of State's investigation into the events surrounding the People's Temple case in which Congressman Leo Ryan was murdered by members of the American community in Jonestown, Guyana. I am pleased to be able to report to you on the steps the Department has taken to implement the recommendations of that investigation, as well as additional measures we have inaugurated to minimize the likelihood that such an occurrence could ever happen again.

Immediately following the events at Jonestown, the Department undertook a comprehensive examination of the contacts between the Department, the American Embassy in Georgetown, Guyana, and the People's Temple Agricultural Community prior to November 18, 1978. We sought to understand the nature of the Department's relationship with the People's Temple so as to improve our own procedures for dealing with similar situations should they arise in the future. The final report of the Department's examination, which was made public in May of this year, is enclosed.

Drawing upon the recommendations contained in this report, the Department took a number of actions designed to improve training opportunities for consular officers, provide better security protection for traveling Congressional delegations, strengthen the degree of coordination between the Bureau of Consular Affairs and the Department's regional bureaus, and upgrade the sensitivity of our country desk officers to the potential ramifications of significant consular problems overseas. We have also just completed a major review of the impact of the Freedom of Information and Privacy Acts upon foreign service reporting, both to ensure that the Department obtains adequate information on the welfare of Americans resident abroad and to guarantee that

general reporting is not adversely affected by the unintended application of the requirements contained in these two laws.

In our study, we canvassed key U.S. embassies and their constituent posts in all geographic areas, and we met with a number of groups in the Department to obtain first-hand views as to the operation of both the Freedom of Information Act and the Privacy Act as they affect the conduct of foreign relations. We have communicated our recommendations as to possible legislative changes to the Justice Department, the agency responsible for coordinating the over-all position of the Executive Branch in this matter. I would be happy to meet with you and your staff to review the findings of our study and discuss the conclusions that we have drawn.

You may already be familiar with the measures we have implemented to improve security protection afforded to Congressional delegations traveling in foreign countries. We have made it a standard practice to request a threat assessment from our posts describing the current security situation in a country to be visited by any member of the U.S. Congress. These threat assessments are periodically updated during the time a delegation may be out of the country, and their contents are shared with the members of the delegation before their departure and during the time of their actual visit. Our Office of Security in the Department accumulates a great deal of information regarding potentially unstable situations abroad and, in cooperation with the Office of Congressional Relations, promptly notifies any Congressional delegation about dangerous situations that may arise during the course of a Congressional visit. In addition, we have also considered providing mobile communications equipment to Congressional delegations that may be traveling to remote or isolated areas of the world, and we have undertaken to provide such equipment on at least one occasion.

With regard to training opportunities for consular officers, we have employed the Jonestown experience specifically as a case study for some advanced consular training exercises. From time to time, consular officers have also been introduced to the psychological aspects of various mind control techniques with specific attention

to the implications of these methods for the provision of normal consular services. We have generally endeavored to heighten the awareness of our consular officers to Jonestown situations, and we have encouraged closer coordination between consular officers in the field and their political and economic counterparts.

Prior to the Jonestown episode, the Department had begun a re-organization of its Office of Overseas Citizens Services. That re-organization has now been completed, and a number of important changes have been made to enable the Department to respond more effectively to situations involving the protection and assistance of U.S. citizens abroad. A Citizens Emergency Center has been established to provide emergency consular assistance, and the Office of Citizens Consular Services has been re-organized on a regional basis so as to improve coordination between consular officials and the regional officers with whom they must often deal.

I hope that this review of the programs inaugurated by the Department since the Jonestown event has been helpful. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss this matter with you in greater depth, and to learn your views as to any further measures that you might consider advisable.

Sincerely yours,

Matthew Nimetz

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